

EMPowerHer



2025

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Tributes to Trailblazing Women

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Chairperson's Spot

Dear Reader,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the third edition of Empower, KEWOPA's quarterly newsletter. Each issue provides us with an opportunity not only to reflect on our collective progress but also to spotlight the leadership, resilience, and determination that define women leaders in Kenya. This edition comes at a pivotal moment as we look back at the year, one filled with both triumphs and challenges and celebrate how far we have come in amplifying women's voices in governance, legislation, and community service.

This quarter, we pay special tribute to the late Mama Phoebe Asiyo, the first Chairperson of the Women's political Caucus. Her courage, conviction, and trailblazing leadership laid the foundation for the progress we enjoy today. As one of the pioneer women who championed the first affirmative action motion in parliament, her work reminds us that our current victories are built upon the sacrifices of the women who came before us, and it challenges us to keep building a more inclusive and equitable future. We also recognize the passing of former Nominated MP Hon. Catherine Nyamato, a fearless advocate for women's rights who boldly championed gender equality. I encourage you to read about their remarkable journeys captured in this issue—it is both moving and inspiring.

Legislative work continues to be at the heart of KEWOPA's mission. Over the past months, our members have tabled bills, motions, and statements addressing critical issues ranging from Gender-Based Violence to infrastructure and development. These efforts underscore the fact that women parliamentarians are not only shaping the gender equality agenda but also contributing meaningfully to Kenya's broader social and economic transformation. In addition, through KEWOPA Mashinani, we have continued engaging with communities at the grassroots in Kilifi, Nyeri and Meru, ensuring that our work resonates beyond the walls of Parliament and directly impacts the lives of ordinary citizens.

In this edition, we are proud to shine the spotlight on Hon. Mary Emaase, Member of Parliament for Teso South. Her influence and dedication to her constituents embody the essence of servant leadership. You will also meet our vibrant Program Manager, Rosemary Juma, whose passion for advancing gender equality is matched only by her creativity and love for Rumba music an example of how women leaders bring both professional excellence and humanity into their work.

I am deeply grateful to the KEWOPA Secretariat for their commendable work in driving our agenda forward with such dedication and creativity. I also wish to thank our partners whose collaboration makes this journey possible, and above all, my fellow Members of Parliament who are the heartbeat of KEWOPA. Together, we are building a legacy of women's leadership that will inspire generations to come.

I invite you to immerse yourself in this edition, celebrate the stories within, and join us in carrying forward the vision of inclusive, transformative leadership for Kenya.

Hon. Leah Sankaire
Chairperson, KEWOPA



Bunge Highlights

Leading With Purpose: Women Legislators Driving Bold Policy Change.

Women legislators continue to shape Kenya's governance landscape through bold statements, motions, and legislative proposals that address pressing economic and social issues. In the last quarter, these legislative efforts continue to demonstrate the transformative leadership of women legislators in championing equity, accountability, and inclusivity across Kenya's governance and development agenda.



KEWOPA Chairperson Hon. Leah Sankaire delivered a statement in response to the recent BBC documentary on girls in Mai Mahiu, calling out the injustices and exploitation faced by young women and girls. She underscored the need for protection of vulnerable communities while reaffirming KEWOPA's commitment to advancing policies that safeguard the rights and dignity of all girls in Kenya.



Hon. Martha Wangari also sought answers from the Interior Cabinet Secretary on the allegations of child sex trafficking in Mai Mahiu. Describing the situation as unacceptable, she sought to know what steps the Ministry was taking to investigate the allegations, requested a detailed report on the number of children being trafficked and what measures the Ministry had put in place to rescue and rehabilitate the affected children back into society. Hon. Wangari further emphasized that protecting vulnerable children must be treated as a national priority and called for stronger action to end such exploitation.



In the health sector, **Hon. Sabina Chege** has tabled a motion on **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**, urging the government to fully implement the Kenya UHC Policy 2020–2030. The motion proposes that all civil servants, public officers, and state officers access healthcare exclusively through public facilities. By directing government-funded medical benefits into public hospitals, the motion seeks to strengthen health systems, improve service delivery, and hold leaders accountable by ensuring they rely on the same facilities as ordinary Kenyans.



Hon. Umulkher Harun has sponsored the **Kenya Sign Language Bill 2023**, which seeks to make Kenya Sign Language a compulsory subject in primary schools. The Bill also establishes a Kenya Sign Language Council to regulate interpreters, enhance professional standards, and ensure accessibility across public institutions, courts, and telecom services. If passed, the Bill will be a landmark step toward equality, dignity, and communication rights for the deaf community. The Bill is co-sponsored by Senator Crystal Asige.

Bunge Highlights



In infrastructure, **Hon. Naisula Lesuuda** has introduced the **Kenya Roads (Amendment) Bill 2024**, which requires all new and upgraded roads to incorporate facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, and persons with disabilities. The Bill obligates road agencies such as KeNHA, KURA, and KeRRA to integrate sidewalks, cycle lanes, and safe crossings into their designs, while imposing penalties for motorists who encroach on these non-motorized lanes. Framed as a matter of justice, dignity, and safety, this Bill seeks to protect millions of Kenyans who walk daily and ensure that road planning becomes more inclusive and people-centered..



Senator Hamida Kibwana raised concerns about the persistent gaps in protecting learners from misconduct within schools. She called on the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) to urgently review existing safeguarding measures, reporting structures, and whistle-blower protections to ensure that students are adequately shielded from abuse. She further proposed a comprehensive audit of safeguarding systems in public boarding schools, particularly for girls, and the introduction of mandatory codes of conduct to hold educators and administrators accountable. She also drew attention to the misuse of influence in religious spaces within schools and strongly advocated for justice and support for survivors who have bravely



Women senators convened to deliberate on the Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Bill, 2025, that seeks to actualize the Two Thirds Gender principle. Key issues on the agenda included the allocation of special seats, representation of special interest groups such as Persons with Disabilities, and proportional representation through party lists following elections. This engagement underscores the commitment of women legislators to driving constitutional reforms that advance inclusive governance and equitable political participation.

Visionary Leaders, Timeless Legacies.

KEWOPA joins the nation and the global women's movement in mourning the passing of Mama Phoebe Muga Asiyio, a trailblazer whose life embodied courage, resilience, and vision. Her legacy was not just political, it was a lifelong commitment to justice, dignity, and service.

As a young social worker during the colonial emergency, Mama Asiyio cared for orphaned children and developed the conviction that would guide her public life. In 1954, she joined Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation, where she fought to Africanize its leadership and redirected its focus to grassroots women's empowerment. Later, as Senior Superintendent of Prisons, she saved a woman from wrongful execution, demonstrating her rare blend of courage and compassion.

Elected MP for Karachuonyo in 1979 and again in 1992, Mama Asiyio fearlessly championed women's rights and marginalized communities. In 1997, she introduced Kenya's first affirmative action motion, laying the groundwork for the Women's Political Caucus, where she became the first Chairperson in 1998.

Her influence reached its peak in the constitution-making process, where as a member of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission, she helped entrench gender equity in the 2010 Constitution through Articles 27(8) and 81(b). These provisions guaranteeing women's representation remain a living legacy of her vision for equality.

For KEWOPA, her timeless words, "It is possible" continue to inspire our mission for a more inclusive and equitable Kenya.

We also honor and recognize the passing on of former Nominated MP Hon. Catherine Nyamato, a fearless advocate for women's rights who boldly championed gender equality, fought against FGM, and inspired generations of women leaders in Kenya. Her unwavering dedication to justice and inclusive leadership leaves behind a powerful legacy that will continue to guide and inspire the struggle for equality and dignity for all.

May their souls rest in eternal peace.

Gender Equality at the Heart of Budget Training in Kilifi County



What does the county budget have to do with gender equality and why should more women step into politics? These questions framed a recent transformative training held in Kilifi aimed at equipping citizens with the knowledge and confidence to shape the governance of their communities. The day-long forum brought together residents from across the county to explore three critical pillars of participatory governance: public participation, budget processes, and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). Through interactive discussions, participants learned that public participation is not merely an invitation to sit in a meeting but a powerful avenue to influence decisions before they are signed into law. They explored how budget processes decide where public funds go and why GRB is essential to ensure that women, youth, and marginalized groups are not an afterthought in development plans but central to them.

What followed was an animated and candid conversation about women's participation in politics. Attendees shared the challenges women face, from entrenched cultural norms and lack of mentorship to the financial hurdles that come with campaigning. The room reached a powerful consensus that change will only come when women claim their space at the decision-making table and when the community actively supports them in doing so. This training underscored a fundamental truth: governance is strongest when it is inclusive, budgets are fair when they reflect the needs of all, and development is sustainable only when the people it serves have been part of the process. In Kilifi, the message resonated loudly that an informed and engaged citizenry is the heartbeat of democracy and women's leadership is its lifeblood.



Building Bridges: Women Leaders Drive Civic Action in Meru



KEWOPA convened a civic engagement forum in Meru that brought together citizens, youth, and emerging leaders for a deep dive into governance, rights, and civic action. The forum aimed to equip participants with practical tools to engage in public decision-making and demand accountability from institutions.

The sessions addressed key issues, including the leadership gap facing women, the constitutional roles of Members of Parliament and Senators, and strategies for influencing both county and national processes. Participants developed action plans, explored local organizing techniques, and committed to actively engaging in public forums where policies and budgets are shaped.

Hon. Ikiara urged the group to stay grounded in civic values; accountability, transparency, empathy, and service and to remain responsive to the needs of women, youth, and marginalized groups. "Leadership isn't power over people, it's partnership with people, with women at the centre," she said.

As discussions closed, participants were challenged to become catalysts of change in their communities. "Be the spark that lights another woman's path," Hon. Ikiara said. "Empowering women empowers nations. When women lead, communities don't just survive, they thrive."



Promoting Inclusive Governance in Nyeri County



Participants of the KEWOPA forum in Nyeri standing together for women's leadership and inclusive governance

What does women's leadership mean for the future of governance? This question guided a civic engagement forum organized by the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) in Nyeri County under the theme "Promoting Women in Decision Making and Governance Processes."

The forum brought together community members, local leaders, and representatives of civic groups to reflect on the role of women in governance and the need for more inclusive political spaces. It created an opportunity to examine how laws, policies, and citizen participation can advance equality and representation at both the county and national levels.

Discussions centered on the legislative framework that supports women in politics, the responsibilities of legislators in championing inclusivity, and the value of affirmative action in bridging persistent gaps in representation. Speakers and participants openly addressed the barriers women face in leadership, including cultural attitudes, limited resources, and unequal access to opportunities.

The forum also underscored the importance of youth engagement, recognizing young people as critical partners in shaping governance that responds to the realities of today's generation. Participants further stressed the urgency of tackling sexual and gender based violence, pointing out that meaningful leadership cannot thrive in environments where women and girls face discrimination, intimidation, or violence.

A strong message emerged on the role of civic education and continuous training in empowering communities to take part in decision making. Participants called for similar forums to be held across the country to raise awareness, build capacity, and sustain momentum for inclusive governance.

KEWOPA urged citizens, leaders, and institutions to support women as they step into political spaces and to champion governance that leaves no one behind. The forum affirmed that the future of governance will be stronger, more accountable, and more responsive when women's voices and leadership are fully included.

Highlights & Engagements

Closing Gaps in Marriage and Family Laws

KEWOPA joined the Kenya Law Reform Commission, UN Women, and IDLO to review the Post-Enactment Evaluation Report on Marriage and Family Laws. The discussion highlighted persistent gaps in the Marriage Act and Matrimonial Property Act that leave women vulnerable to inequality and harm.

Members pledged to back urgent reforms and push for stronger civic education so women know and can claim their rights. As KEWOPA affirmed, the law must protect women not only in writing but in practice.



Hon. Janet Sitienei at the review of marriage and family laws.

Devolution and Good Governance: A Call for Accountability and Equity

At the Devolution Conference 2025 in Homa Bay, Senator Catherine Mumma underscored the importance of integrity, accountability, and stronger intergovernmental relations in realizing good governance. Hon. Millie Odhiambo echoed the call for vigilance, reminding leaders that devolution is Kenya's pathway to equitable growth and must serve all citizens beyond political divides.

Both leaders stressed that the promise of devolution can only be achieved if institutions remain accountable and citizens are empowered to demand transparency. Their reflections served as a timely reminder that good governance is not just a constitutional ideal but a daily commitment to fairness, justice, and inclusive development.



Hon. Catherine Mumma speaks during the Devolution Conference 2025 in Homa Bay

Women, Land Rights & Climate Resilience

Women continue to face systemic barriers in accessing and owning land, despite bearing the brunt of challenges such as gender-based violence and the effects of climate change that threaten their livelihoods. To address these gaps, KEWOPA has reaffirmed its commitment to championing legal reforms that secure women's land rights, while fostering partnerships with Parliament, government agencies, civil society, IGAD, and youth caucuses. A new sub-caucus on Land Rights has been established, with Hon. Lilian Gogo elected as Chairperson, to spearhead these efforts. The initiative also focuses on empowering grassroots women through awareness and capacity building, ensuring they are equipped to claim and defend their rights. By integrating gender and climate resilience into land management, KEWOPA is paving the way for a more inclusive and sustainable future.



KEWOPA E.D. Mercy Mwangi speaks on securing women's land rights.

Highlights & Engagements

Strengthening Secretariat Effectiveness for Greater Impact

The KEWOPA Secretariat engagement focused on reviewing HR policies, workplace wellness, and reflecting on achievements from 2024 to mid-2025. Staff also explored innovative approaches to strengthen communication for greater internal and external effectiveness.

Key discussions highlighted operational effectiveness, funding priorities for 2025 to 2027, and institutional growth. The program concluded with an action plan that reaffirmed KEWOPA's commitment to service delivery, staff well-being, and advancing women's leadership in governance.



Sylvester Jagero shares insights on operational effectiveness during the engagement.

Driving KEWOPA's Strategic Agenda

KEWOPA members met to set strategic priorities for the coming months. Discussions focused on the two-thirds gender principle, amplifying women leaders' voices, outcomes from the meeting with the Chief Justice, and strengthening engagement with former members and other key leaders.

The session also reviewed the Komesha Dhuluma campaign, outlined legislative and parliamentary priorities, and examined programmatic areas including gender-responsive budgeting, women's political participation, GBV, and the care economy. Members resolved to deepen partnerships with development partners and advance women's representation in Kenya's political agenda.



KEWOPA Chair addresses members during the strategy session.

Strengthening Partnerships for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

The Follow-Up National Multistakeholder Meeting on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR) was held in Nairobi, bringing together over 50 representatives from government, civil society, interfaith leaders, rightsholders, pharmaceuticals, media, and development partners. The meeting reviewed Kenya's 4th Cycle Universal Periodic Review recommendations and focused on strengthening policy action, accountability, and collaboration to close gaps in access to reproductive health services.

KEWOPA was represented by Hon. Gathoni Wamuchomba, who underscored the role of women parliamentarians in advancing inclusive legislation and ensuring accountability. The meeting reaffirmed commitment to safeguarding adolescent rights and amplifying their voices in national policy and legislative frameworks.



Hon. Wamuchomba during the advancing inclusive legislation on ASRHR workshop.

Katiba at 15: Affirmative Action Milestones

This year, Kenya marks 15 years since the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 a transformative charter that placed equality, human rights, and social justice at the heart of governance.

Over the past decade, affirmative action measures have spurred landmark policy achievements, such as the Children's Act, which strengthened the protection of children's rights, and the Sexual Offences Act, which expanded safeguards against gender-based violence. These milestones demonstrate the power of inclusive legislation in advancing social justice and equality.

CONSTITUTION AND CONSTITUTIONALISM: HITS AND MISSES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSTITUTION OF KENYA 2010 (A GENDER PERSPECTIVE)

HITS



More women
in politics

MISSES



2/3 Gender Rule
remains unfulfilled

Hits: More women in politics | Misses: 2/3 gender rule

The persistent gap in implementing the two-thirds gender principle reflects deeper structural and cultural barriers that continue to hinder women's equal participation in governance. From political party dynamics that sideline women candidates, to limited resources and systemic biases, the journey toward parity has faced numerous setbacks. Yet, the principle remains a constitutional imperative and its full realization is essential for strengthening democracy, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring that women's voices and perspectives are fully represented in shaping the nation's future.

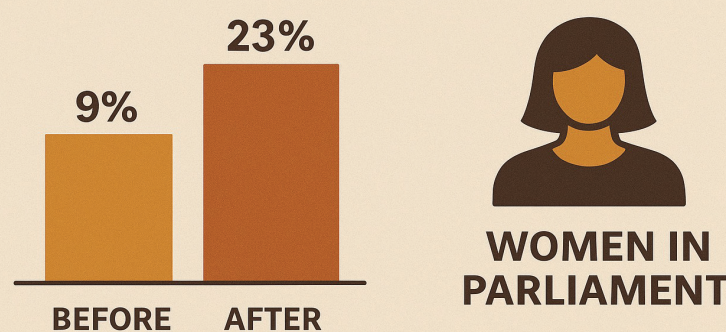
Without the full enforcement of the two-thirds gender rule, the spirit of the Constitution remains unfulfilled. KEWOPA therefore issues an urgent call to action: Parliament must enact legislation that actualizes this constitutional requirement. Doing so will not only uphold constitutional fidelity but also guarantee that both women and men contribute equally to Kenya's democratic journey.

As Kenya reflects on 15 years of constitutionalism, let this anniversary serve as a reminder that the promise of equity and inclusivity can only be achieved when all voices are represented at the decision-making table.

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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

SINCE 2010 CONSTITUTION



Women in Parliament: 9% 23% since 2010 Constitution.

Beyond the Bench: Supporting Women Parliamentarians to Close the Gender Gap



While women represent roughly 50 percent of the population of Kenya, the country remains woefully behind in fair representation by women in elected office at all levels, from the county to the national level. Despite an increase in the number of women parliamentarians, systemic challenges persist that make it difficult for women to step fully into leadership and to influence policies and resource allocation in ways that address the needs of all citizens.

Over the past two years, the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) has partnered with the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) through the Strengthening Parliamentary Leadership for Transformative Action on Health and Gender Outcomes (SPALTA) program. This partnership has been driven by a shared commitment to gender-transformative policies and ensuring that public finance decisions reflect the realities of women, men, girls, and boys across Kenya. Through this collaboration, women legislators have been able to influence key fiscal processes such as the, Budget Policy Statement, Budget Estimates and the Finance Bill by using evidence-based advocacy. These efforts have resulted in the adoption of gender-responsive recommendations, ensuring that public resources better meet the needs of women and vulnerable groups.

The program has also fostered deeper collaboration with male legislators, encouraging them to move beyond symbolic allyship to practical, sustained action. By actively engaging men as partners in the gender equality agenda, the initiative has broadened KEWOPA's coalition for change and demonstrated that inclusive policymaking is stronger and more effective when all voices are at the table. These alliances have also helped challenge stereotypes, build consensus across political divides, and reinforce the principle that gender equity benefits every part of society not just women. In addition, the partnership has enhanced the visibility of women legislators by amplifying their leadership and strengthening their communication capacity. Through targeted training for communications managers supporting women MPs, KEWOPA has improved its ability to frame legislative priorities, tell compelling stories, and connect more effectively with the public. This has resulted in stronger storytelling, a vibrant digital presence, and wider recognition of women's leadership in governance.

One of the most important lessons learned from this journey is the value of linking Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) with health in an integrated way. Evidence consistently shows that investing in WEE delivers significant returns for families, communities, and the nation. Guided by a clear Theory of Change, SPALTA is working to embed Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), health financing, and policymaking into Kenya's fiscal and parliamentary systems. The journey so far underscores a critical lesson: when evidence, advocacy, and visibility converge, parliament becomes a powerful driver of transformative action—delivering tangible progress on health, WEE, and gender equality outcomes for all Kenyans.

Hon. Mary Emaase Otucho: Trailblazing Leader from the Marginalized Iteso Community

In the heart of the Teso region, where leadership has long been dominated by men, Hon. Mary Emaase Otucho has emerged as a trailblazer. The first woman elected Member of Parliament for Teso South, she shattered barriers and inspired women and young girls to believe that they too can lead and shape the future. Her guiding mantra, “Kazi Kwanza” (Work First), defines her people centered and results driven leadership.

From the onset, education has been at the core of her vision. She has championed the establishment and strengthening of institutions such as Alupe University, Okame Technical Training Institute, Omoloi Agriculture College, Asiri-am Sports Academy, and Kamunoi Teachers Training College. These have expanded opportunities in higher learning, skills development, sports, and teacher training. She has also pushed for more classrooms, laboratories, and dormitories, affirming that education is the bridge that will take Teso to a future of dignity and prosperity.

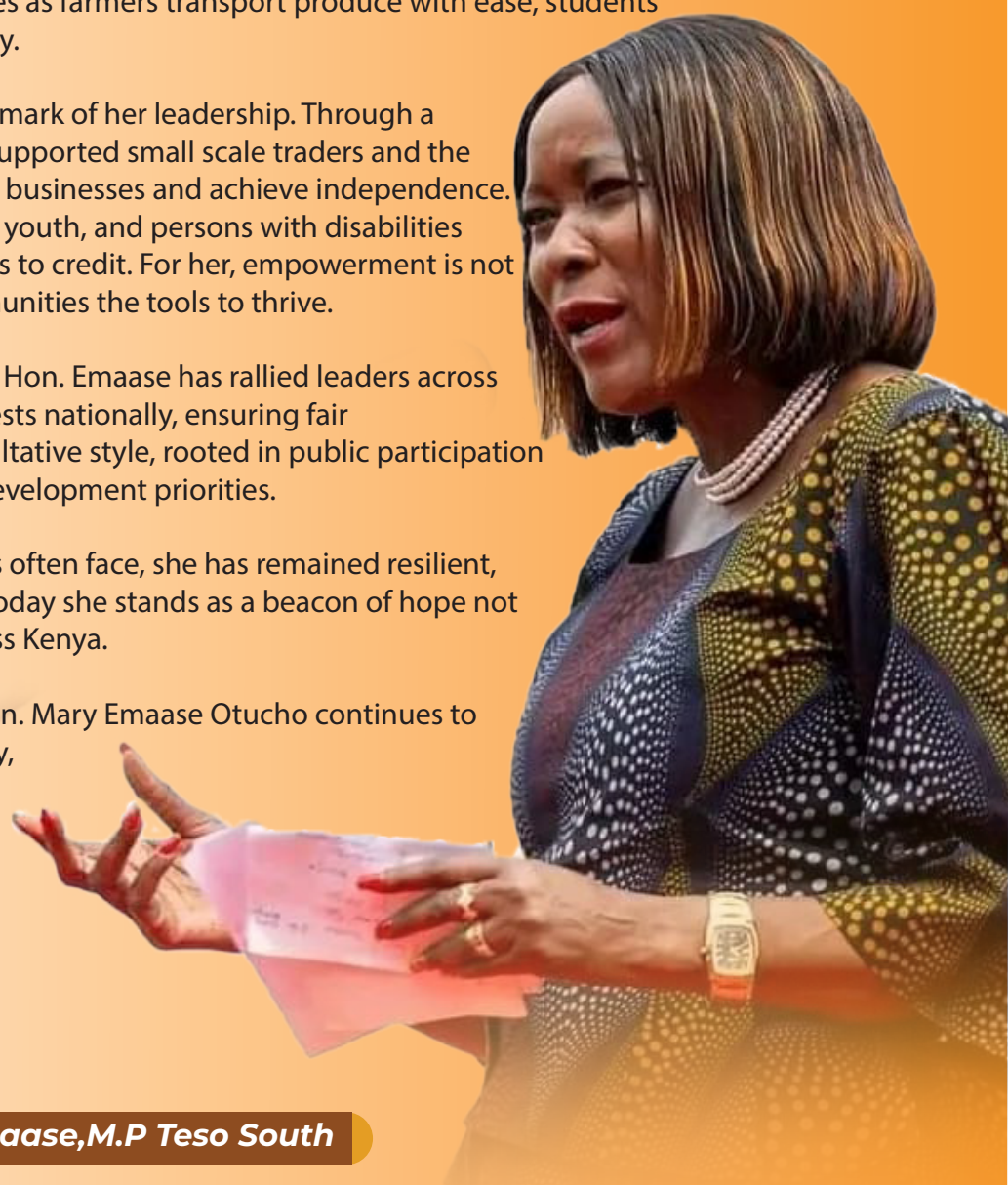
Beyond education, Hon. Emaase has prioritized healthcare and infrastructure. She spearheaded the upgrading of Lukolis Hospital, ensuring specialized services closer to home. Roads now connect villages to markets, electricity has reached more households, and water access has improved through initiatives such as the Alupe Dam rehabilitation. These efforts directly impact families as farmers transport produce with ease, students study at night, and mothers deliver safely.

Economic empowerment is another hallmark of her leadership. Through a KSh 9.8 million revolving fund, she has supported small scale traders and the jua kali sector, enabling families to grow businesses and achieve independence. Her Inua Mama initiative uplifts women, youth, and persons with disabilities through mentorship, training, and access to credit. For her, empowerment is not about handouts but about giving communities the tools to thrive.

Equally important is her role as a unifier. Hon. Emaase has rallied leaders across constituencies to champion Teso’s interests nationally, ensuring fair representation and resources. Her consultative style, rooted in public participation forums, gives citizens a direct voice in development priorities.

Despite the resistance women in politics often face, she has remained resilient, turning challenges into opportunities. Today she stands as a beacon of hope not just for Teso but for women leaders across Kenya.

Focused on her Kazi Kwanza agenda, Hon. Mary Emaase Otucho continues to shape Teso South into a region of dignity, opportunity, and inclusive growth.



Hon. Mary Emaase, M.P Teso South

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Rosemary Juma, Programs Manager

1. Looking back on your time at KEWOPA, what's a project or moment that really made you think, "Yes, this is why I do what I do"?

As a strong believer in women's leadership, the 2022 election results were truly rewarding. During the campaign period, KEWOPA actively supported women Members of Parliament seeking to retain their seats by equipping their teams with training, providing publicity through local media, and supplying Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials. This targeted support yielded encouraging outcomes: 14 out of 23 women MPs retained their constituency seats, 15 out of 47 County Woman Representatives and 2 Women Senators were re-elected, and four women MPs from the 12th Parliament ascended to the position of Governor.

2. We hear you're a big fan of Rumba music, what is it about those rhythms that gets you moving?

Ah, Rumba... it's like the music touches your heart. It's music for the soul. It takes you gently by the hand and leads you onto the dance floor, even if you swore you were just there to listen in. The guitars weave together like old friends catching up over sweet memories, the bass hums steady like a heartbeat, and the drums whisper secrets that only your feet can understand. It's not just music; it's a conversation, a story, and a celebration, all told in the language of hips and heartbeats.

3. Do you have a go-to Rumba song or artist that instantly lifts your mood?

This is a hard one. I have so many favourites on repeat. But right now, I have to go with Second Chance by Ferre Gola. I'm a proud Ferre Gola fan - one of the Golois (that's "Golowa" if you're saying it right) and when that track plays, it's like the world pauses just to let the melody sink in.

4. Now, about that carrot cake... what makes the perfect one for you — is it the frosting, the spices, or the moist crumb?

Just everything! For me, the perfect carrot cake is like a warm hug you can eat. The spices? Oh, they're the soul of it cinnamon, nutmeg, maybe a whisper of ginger just enough to make your taste buds dance. Then there's the frosting: tangy, cheesy, creamy, and unapologetically thick, because life is too short for stingy layers.

5. When work gets hectic, what's your secret to unwinding and recharging?

When work gets hectic, I turn up the rhumba and let the music do the heavy lifting. There's something magical about those rhythms and beats, they untangle the stress in my head faster than any spa day.

6. If you could trade places with someone for a day — in any field, anywhere in the world, who would it be?


If I could trade places with someone for a day, I would choose myself, but in a courtroom halfway across the world perhaps at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Imagine presiding over cases that shape not just a nation, but the global order. At the end of the day, I would return home with a fresh perspective and probably a few ideas on how to make our own justice system even sharper.



Rosemary Juma, Programs Manager

Gallery





We extend our sincere appreciation to our esteemed partners—Parliament of Kenya, Institute of Public Finance(IPF), ID Insight, DANIDA, URAIA, UN Women, Centre for Parliamentary Studies (CPST), NIMD-Kenya, State Department of Gender, Global Affairs Canada, NGECC, UNFPA, CREAM, CRAWN TRUST, KAS and KYPA for their invaluable support, collaboration, and commitment in making this second quarter a success.

This newsletter was made possible by KEWOPA Communications Department - Vincent Korir and Dorothy Muriu under the leadership of Mercy Mwangi(ED) and Rosemary Juma(PM)

